



The Insider

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Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10

May 23, 2008

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a location near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See schedule for details.

Mickey's Blog: The Meaning of Memorial Day

Regardless of your personal feelings on the decision to go to war in Iraq, it is important to remember the thousands of young men and women who are in harm's way on a daily basis. These enlisted men and women volunteered to serve in our military so that they could be the guardians of our democracy and the freedoms that are bestowed upon us. These men and women serve with dedication and honor; they are heroes.

Memorial Day is about honoring those that gave their lives in defense of our nation. As a way of marking this special day, I share the following tributes that I have made on the Senate floor in the past. I share these tributes so that we can honor and remember these exemplary young men. Each soldier represents a different background, a unique story, but all embody the qualities that make our nation great.

Mickey

Tribute to Cpl Gentian Marku

*Marine Corps-1st Battalion, 8th Regiment, 2nd Marine Division
-(as cited in the Senate Journal, December 2, 2004)*

"The war in Iraq hit close to home for one local family during the Thanksgiving holiday (November 25, 2004). The story of Corporal Gentian Marku embodies what America is about: a land of freedom and opportunity.

As you know, our colleague Senator Dennis Olshove (D-Warren) is home recuperating from illness. Therefore, I rise in his place to pay special tribute to U.S. Marine Corporal Gentian Marku, age 22, of Warren, Michigan, who was killed in action in Falluja, Iraq, on Thanksgiving Day.

Gentian was a recent immigrant to this country from his native Albania. When Gentian was 14, his

future looked grim. Albania was in turmoil. The government collapsed amid scandals and bankruptcy. During the civil strife, military arsenals were looted by mobs. During the chaos, Gentian himself was skipping school often. When he did go, he got suspended for throwing an eraser at his teacher. Then his father won the U.S. State Department's Diversity Visa Lottery, a program that randomly selects foreign applicants for visas. The Marku family got the chance to immigrate to Warren, Michigan.

The move changed Gentian's life. "Everything changed when I got to the United States," he recalled. "I started studying. I got my first job ever as a busboy at Big Boy's. I stayed out of trouble." The story of the Marku family is a story that has been written millions of times in America. It is a story of immigrants coming to this country and working hard to build a new life. Gentian Marku's parents spoke little English and worked two and three jobs to give him and his young sister a chance for a good life.

Instead of pelting his teachers with erasers, Gentian spent extra hours with them in the Warren Woods/Tower ESL, that's the English as a Second Language program, learning to speak English.

Luckily that was before many such programs were cut as a result of tight budgets. He handled the family bills and took care of things around the house, becoming a responsible adult while still a teenager.

I saw former Senator Art Miller (D-Warren) this morning who knew Gentian and had seen him working as a busboy. He said to the owner of the restaurant, "Where did you get this kid? He does the work of three people. He is tremendous." Well, that is what Gentian was; he was a hard-working person.

He transformed himself into a high achieving, popular young man. He dreamed of being a Warren cop someday, so he joined the Explorers, a program for youngsters interested in careers as policemen. After graduation, he enlisted in the Marines, rising to the level of corporal. With his hard-won English skills, he served as the translator for the commander of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit during an official visit with Albanian civilian and military leaders.

He returned to his village. All of his relatives came to see him at his grandfather's house. They were impressed by the boy who had left his village six years earlier and had returned a man. "Six years ago," his Uncle Ndue announced, "a kid left Albania, and today a man stands before me who is part of the greatest military force in the world. I am happy he decided to join the Marines. It shows me he is very proud of the country where he now lives."

Gentian was killed on Thanksgiving Day in Falluja. Friends called it ironic because he was always thankful for the opportunities life offered when he came to America. Those opportunities come at a price. For us all to be free, a few pay a heavy price. Gentian's death was the price he paid so we all can enjoy a life of freedom and opportunity. As we work today to create a society that is better, fairer, and more just, I pray that we do it with a tenth of the bravery, commitment, and dedication to duty that characterized the life of Gentian Marku.

His family will return his body to the old country for burial with his ancestors. He will return there a U.S. citizen and a hero. America only had Gentian Marku for eight years. He enjoyed many opportunities from this country. America got much more in return from him. We, therefore, offer this tribute to the life of Gentian Marku and offer our heartfelt condolences to his family in this difficult time."

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Tribute to LCpl Allan Klein

*Marine Corps-1st Battalion, 3rd Regiment, 3rd Marine Division
-(as cited in the Senate Journal, February 2, 2005)*

"I rise to pay special tribute to U.S. Marine Lance Corporal Allan Klein, age 34, of Clinton Township, Michigan, who was killed in action in Iraq one week ago (January 26, 2005) near the Jordanian border.

Allan was nearing the end of a 4-year hitch in the Marines. In fact, he was on his last mission in Iraq when the CH53E helicopter he was riding in crashed, killing him and 30 brothers-in-arms. His last mission was to secure the Iraqi border with Jordan for this past Sunday's elections. It was the single deadliest event in the war and the most Marines to die at once since the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983.

Allan grew up in Roseville, where he attended Wellington Elementary and Eastland Junior High before graduating from Barblec High School in 1988. As a boy, he read avidly about the naval battles of World War II, a war in which his two grandfathers had fought. One fought for Germany; one fought for America. Allan studied engineering at Michigan Tech, but grew restive. His life changed in the aftermath of September 11th.

Allan was a thoughtful, quiet person. After the attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, he decided to devote his life to something bigger than himself. I imagine many of us were struck with those feelings. But for Allan, it was more than just feelings. He had the courage to act on his beliefs. He quit his job and enlisted in the United States Marines. His mother Rae tried to talk him out of it. She worried about him and wrote, called, and e-mailed him regularly, but Allan was determined. When he was offered a job in the motor pool, he rejected it and asked to serve in the infantry. He was already 30 years old, but he endured the rigors of boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina, and trained in basic infantry in North Carolina. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, III Marine Expeditionary Force in Hawaii.

He participated in the assault on Fallujah, where he received shrapnel wounds and had seen members of his unit killed and injured. He felt that he had done his duty and looked forward to the day he would leave Iraq. That day was less than a fortnight away.

One final mission remained. His unit was to secure the Iraqi-Jordanian border as part of the effort to maintain order during the January 30th election. Every soldier fears being the last man to die in a conflict or getting killed on your final mission. Allan had a foreboding about it and wrote to his mother. He was ready to come home and get a job and buy a house and start a family. Rae prayed he would return home safely.

Allan Klein's helicopter crashed during a sandstorm in the Iraqi desert, killing all 31 soldiers on board. Allan was the 1,418th soldier to die in the war. His mother, who is a deputy clerk in Roseville, came home from work last Friday afternoon and got the news about her son from two Marines who came to her door.

Allan Klein is survived by his parents, Rae Oldaugh and Manfred Klein; his stepmother, Patricia Klein; his stepfather, Randall Oldaugh; his brother, Kurt; a stepbrother, Christopher Miletich; and a stepsister, Stephanie Lindsay.

Allan Klein gave his life to serve our country. He died in defense of something bigger than himself. We owe a debt to him and all of his comrades who have suffered and died for us. We, therefore, offer this tribute to the life of Allan Klein and offer our heartfelt condolences to his family in this difficult time."

Mickey's Letter Bag: Allowing 16-Year Olds to Vote

In the last issue of the *Insider E-newsletter*, I shared with you my floor speech on Senate Joint Resolution N, a constitutional amendment that would allow 16- and 17-year olds the right to vote in school board elections. I have received a ton of feedback, some in favor and the majority in opposition and questioning whether I belong in an insane asylum. I have included some of your e-mails below. In addition, if you would like to hear more information on Senate Joint Resolution N, check out the following video link: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=LDcagCx0Upk>
Mickey

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With all of the distractions in the Senior Year of High School, athletics, prom, college decisions, and others I'm sure, do you think that they will take the time to research the candidate's qualifications given the fact that the older voters turn out in such low numbers and those that do probably vote on a name that sounds good? Perhaps your suggestion has some merit but I believe it needs more study.

Jerry Schmidt
Sterling Heights

Thanks for having an open mind, Jerry. This would probably include juniors and seniors, and the ones who care about getting a good education, a job, or entry to a good college would be the ones most likely to take their vote seriously. Something 90% of adults, as you point out, don't do.
Mickey

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Dear Senator Switalski,

I cannot vote for you or against you as I do not reside in your district, however your vote or legislation that you propose can possibly affect me and my taxes. Senator your proposal to let 16-year olds vote in school elections needs to be given more thought and then ditched.

I find this Senate Act to be in direct conflict with what you are trying to do. Even though you profess to have me believe that these 16-year olds cannot vote for millage or school bonds are misleading and disingenuous. Senator, these pupils will have been polarized by the teachers that teach them on how to vote in school elections.

Their votes for trustees who may be elected, by their vote, will be the ones to vote for millages and bond proposals. So in affect their votes will affect my property taxes. With all due respect to you, what union PAC suggested this to you?... I have personally paid my school taxes for 51 years and my children have been out of school for 30 years. Oh, by the way, I paid for them to have a parochial education and never received a tax break or asked for one.

Today is different, more money has been spent on education in the last 20 years than on national defense and what has this money gotten for this country? A dysfunctional education system. If you want to do some good for your constituents, who, you have sworn to represent, start looking at the laws that have been passed subsidizing union pay. Start with the Pay Equalization Act, Senator, and forget about tampering with school elections.

Regards,
Richard Jedd

Bloomfield Hills

Dear Richard:

Thanks for your email. The union and school community hate my proposal. It would upset the status quo. You don't seem to like the status quo. Why do you resist attempts to change it? As for Board members supporting bond issues, have you ever heard of a Board turning one down? But all they can do is put it on the ballot. It is up to the voters to approve. And when less than 10% of voters cast ballots in school elections, who are really deciding matters?

I send my child to Catholic school, but I have never complained because it is all our responsibility to see that kids are educated. Don't forget they have to take care of us when we are all seniors. So don't get too stingy. Mickey

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Senator Switalski,

Again, your idea to allow 16-year olds limited voting rights is quite innovative and as I said, has an historic precedent. For further information on Negro suffrage in Michigan, I recommend this book: Katzman, David M. Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973.

If I may, I would like to offer a suggestion from my own experience. I cast my first ballot in the primary election of 1980. I grew up in a very stable neighborhood in northwest Detroit - Mom still lives there. The whole time I was growing up, almost nobody ever moved. That summer, I went to the polls with Mom and Dad and when neighbors saw me with them everyone reacted with, first surprise, then joy that I was there to vote. Some of the men from my block pulled me from line, insisting that I be ushered to the front of line and announcing loudly that I was about to cast my first ballot. Yes, it was a tad embarrassing but after I voted and I got a very warm and enthusiastic ovation and handshakes all around. Remember, many of those people were migrants from southern states and remembered, all too well, when Black people in general and many of them in particular, were prohibited from voting. I've told friends about that subsequently and they all say, "Well, I didn't get anything like that." I say, "Why not?". Why not try to dovetail that with your idea. Along with the education about our system of government, why not celebrate participation? In the 19th century, Election Day was a festival in most towns. They had bands and barbecue at the polls! In the twenty-first century, perhaps one's first "restricted ballot" and subsequent first "full voting rights ballot" should be like a miniature "coming out" party. Perhaps a special badge, like the "I voted today", maybe take their photograph.

Thank you for letting me share the idea with you and again, thank you for your idea and commitment to voting and young voters.

Sincerely

Peter M. Williams

Southfield

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Allowing 16-year olds the right to vote in only school board elections creates a myriad of problems at the polls. How are the voter lists going to be provided to the election poll personnel. If they get a list, how will the 16-year olds be highlighted? What would happen if a millage election and the school board election were on the same ballot?

Alan A. Beltz

Roseville

Those are very legitimate problems, but we do similar things to account for no coterminous districts like Fraser and Roseville school district boundaries, and the various commissioners, us rep and legislative

districts. Certainly a complicating problem, but not insurmountable.
Mickey

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Senator Switalski:

You've got to be kidding me! Making it legal for 16-year olds to vote in school board elections? Our children can't read or write properly now...and you want them now to undertake official voting?

Do you think that student's really care? In high school, they're more interested in dating, Facebook, Myspace, tunes, etc. Anyway, isn't that what student body class elections are for? During this time, the students are given the opportunity to voice their opinions, vote, and then experience the voting process.

Wow, just think of all the influences the teachers would have on who the students vote for. Come on now! Do you think we're stupid here? What's next? Are you going to push for the drinking and smoking age to be dropped down to 16 too?

Please, be serious here. Work on more important things that you're paid with tax dollars to do, than curtailing to 16-year olds and things that are less important.

Susan Burkle
Roseville

Dear Susan:

Who do you think would vote? I think the honors students who want a better education would vote. The kids you refer to sound a lot like the 90+ percent of current eligible voters who don't vote in school board elections. Mickey

Coffee Hours

*In response to requests from constituents, I have added coffee hours in Roseville and during the daytime. Here are my next scheduled coffee hours. Please feel to stop on by or make an appointment by calling my office.

June 26, 2008 7-8 p.m.	September 29, 2008 1:30-2:30
Location: Clinton-Macomb Public Library (40900 Romeo Plank) Clinton Township	Location: Biggby Coffee (26740 Gratiot, south of I-696) Roseville

Mickey's TV Insider Show

Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

Sterling Heights

Every Saturday and Sunday at 1 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Utica

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Clinton Township

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Roseville

Various Times-check local listings
(Comcast Channel 18/WOW Channel 10)

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